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Lost in translation: western representations of Māori knowledge

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ABSTRACT

We recently attended a conference at which a non-Māori presenter, drawing on a particular metaphor already established by Māori writers, related Māori natural world features to a research method. The presentation was useful because it highlighted several issues that call for our concern as Māori philosophers. In this article, we outline these concerns, which are: first, that a blunt response to such a presentation is not undertaken lightly from a Māori viewpoint; and, second, that the presenter's talk exemplifies a wider problem of warping Māori concepts and labels to fit a Western philosophical approach. We call this latter problem 'Translation', because it involves moving the Māori world and its phenomena over into one that is palatable for policy and research. The aim of the article is not to single out the presenter, but rather to refer to his presentation in order to consider the prior issue of Translation. In cases where Translation occurs, a Māori critical philosophical stance is clearly needed, in order to both investigate the warping of Māori thought on which it relies, and review the place of Māori philosophy and philosophical response in the arena of educational research.

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The real worth of an academic conference might depend on whether it provokes fruitful debate or simply seeks agreement amongst its participants. For the indigenous attendee, most Western (i.e. non-indigenous) presentations will invite a response at some point, and for non-indigenous persons present, that response may appear to be untethered or unpredictable. To generalise: local indigenous experiences probably teach us to answer a point according to the identity of the person speaking, the respondent and his or her relationship to that interlocutor, the nature of the content being expressed and the responder's reaction to that content, and various other factors. It is not unusual, for instance, for indigenous attendees to respond to a point raised by the presenter as if the latter had never spoken. It would be a mistake to read that reaction as if it were unrelated, just because the original utterance was not addressed; the indigenous addressee might be honouring the original presentation by taking it to another realm. Alternatively, in a fashion probably more familiar for the non-indigenous audience, we may more directly address the talk,

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disagreeing and/or agreeing with it. At other times, we may see a need to ratchet up the bluntness of the language we draw on, especially if we take particular umbrage with a point made by the mainstream speaker. Undoubtedly the blunt reaction is not used only by indigenous scholars, but he or she may be especially quick to resort to it if indigenous conceptual or social communities are perceived as under threat and in need of protection, despite what appear to be merely academic contexts. There are also different reasons for when Māori might choose to resort to the blunt response, along with cautions against its quick and unconsidered adoption. One risk in delivering a blunt response is that the indigenous view is misread by the mainstream interlocutor as being irrational or arbitrary and hence dismissed – particularly in a much broader context in which non-Western philosophy may be regarded as not really philosophy, even if unconsciously (Park, 2013).

We are concerned in this article with that last instance – the blunt indigenous response to the non-indigenous speaker. Related to that mode of response is the issue of ‘provocative material’ which, in the context of this article, was a Māori metaphor for an essentially Western research paradigm. First, we shall consider the nature of no-nonsense responses to an utterance from a Māori perspective, in the context of an academic conference. We suggest that to respond directly calls on a particular Māori philosophy of language, where one is deliberately asking language itself to connect forcefully with the thinking of the presenter. Ethically speaking, directly addressing the Other with complete bluntness is not undertaken lightly, not just because it may upset the hearer, but also because of the nature of language: language is a largely autonomous phenomenon, with its own spiritual accrual, and it retains its own intent to itself. Second, we recount an example of a presentation at a recent conference we attended, and the public response to it by one of the authors. Our recounting of this instance is difficult because, from a Māori viewpoint, aspects of anonymity must be maintained in order to honour the presenter (incidentally, the response actually bestowed a kind of honour on the presenter!). Third, we discuss what it was about the presenter’s talk that incited the direct response: why we took exception to the way the Pākehā presenter drew on Māori material about nature. Our objection was directed not so much to the presenter as to the way in which his presentation uncritically accepted the appropriation and caricature of Māori language and ideas. His presentation was not, by any means, unique in this regard. This article thus discusses Māori objections to presentations of Māori knowledge by Pākehā scholars, methods of Māori response, and the general philosophical problem of dragging Western research paradigms into the Maori domain.

The nature of response: blunt language

In many Western cultures, a response to an utterance is seen as valid if it connects directly with the logic of the latter: I say something, you answer in correspondence to its meaning. With this form, the exchange makes sense, and we can rest assured that an objective truth has been at least strived for, and possibly achieved. While this mode of utterance-and-response is also valid in Māori scenarios, it is not *the* prized one. Māori discussants may hear the other’s words but leave them behind, and, to the uninitiated, it can seem as if the response has not met the logical components of the initial utterance. The lateral jump from the initial utterance, rather than neatly interlocking with it, suggests that the

initial utterance has simply acted as an impetus. The responder has not necessarily disdained the first words, but language and thought seem to have drawn him or her on to something else. Perhaps there *is* a murky relationship of logic between the utterances of each speaker, but there need not be; many Māori contexts may resemble a mosaic, where one set of words builds up to another seemingly unrelated set. This ‘whakapapa’ (layering) or ‘raranga’ (a conscious act of layering) of utterances does not rely on Aristotelean logic, because it treats language as an entity with its own materiality of its own making, rather than as deriving from the human self (Browne, 2005). The steps to an outcome in a Māori forum are formed in part by the bricolage of utterances, not always through the jigsaw nature of their symmetry.

Of course, this description is a generalisation and therefore a simplification, because it is not unusual for Māori interlocutors to question the veracity of a comment or test its validity by more conventional methods (in the dominant Western sense of method). Moreover, an academic conference is unlike the average Māori forum, and the Māori attendee is forced to abandon the various forms of interplay between self and language that may flourish in a Māori context, in favour of a logical approach to response. It is here that we encounter one other instance of hegemony that the Māori academic must navigate: the denial of the culturally appropriate response. The nature of an academic response appears not to be a significant theme in philosophy because it is apparently so self-evident as to be undiscussable, but in situations where the Māori participant reacts to an address, it is precisely the most microscopic elements of the entire process that need to be analysed philosophically. Thus, to consider the direct response as the *only* kind of response is momentous for a Māori philosophy because it sets the scene for the nature of Māori attitude, as well as the parameters of what constitutes a response.

The direct response may well be the close relative of the *blunt* one. They are related, but we distinguish them on the basis of the emotion apparent within the latter. In Māori forums, a response that is logically aimed ***at*** another, through strong emotion, is significant. We bold and italicise ‘at’ deliberately there to show that something is indeed forcefully directed *towards* or *onto* another. It is somewhat more common to see one emotionally address another’s words without logically responding to them. There could be several reasons for not choosing to tackle another’s words head-on, and we speculate on some of these here. First, angry reactions are more appropriate for the outside space on the marae (meeting space), as the inside of the whare (house) is an embodiment of the supreme entity of peace (Cleave, 1997). We note that even in the outside space, though, one’s words tend to be tangentially addressed by another speaker. Second, language itself deserves respect as a self-organising, self-responding entity, not entirely of the human self’s making. It is possible to think of the Māori self as being used *by* language rather than the direct creator of it (Mika, 2017), or to imagine language as a sort of world disclosure (Heidegger, 1967), where an entity and its world wish to disclose themselves materially through it. When perceived in these ways, care must be taken not to enforce language too strictly. Further, language’s materiality, and its association with the world, can be either intangible or perceptible, but it will have a solid impact on both the utterer and the recipient of the words. It is a well-known fact among many Māori that words can either make or break the natural world, for reasons beyond our knowledge. With these points in mind, the Māori conference attendee may often keep quiet – not

necessarily because it is the better part of valour, but due to the possibilities for world-transformation that language holds.

Thus, to speak directly *at* both someone else and their words, in anger or mockery for instance, needs to be a careful and well-articulated act. For Māori, ideas are as much a part of the community as the human self, as they adjoin the world in a material way (Mika, 2017). Speakers who are not well acquainted with a Māori-derived idea are therefore likely to provoke a charged response because the Māori respondent sees the need to nurture the idea as if it were another human. This is particularly true in philosophy, where ideas are most important. It will now hopefully be clear to the reader that the idea, from a Māori perspective, is vulnerable to a human intrusion, in much the same way as language.

We can see here that the fabric of an idea is provided by what it relates to; it has past and future connections to other ideas and entities, such as nothingness, light and darkness, among others. The idea is hence one manifestation of these other entities, which give human and worldly sustenance. To treat the idea in a cavalier way – to overly simplify it or metaphorise it in a simplistic manner, despite one's best intentions – will invoke a stinging response. It must be remembered, especially for the section that we now turn to, that the blunt response is not only to the *correctness* of the idea, but is also meant as a correction to the potential damage to the idea itself.

A recent example – a vignette

At a recent conference keynote presentation, one of us used question time to take public exception to the main idea the speaker had presented. Moreover – and, as the presenter himself would note later, this was beyond his control – he gravely mispronounced Māori words. These he used liberally in an opening mihi (greeting speech) and in presenting his main examples. In his presentation, the speaker attempted to show that national research funding in Aotearoa-New Zealand recognises 'multiple knowledge systems' including not only the conventional Western knowledge bases, but also those of Māori and Pacific peoples. He began with a synopsis of the history of Aotearoa-New Zealand, which included the outmoded assertion that Māori 'ceded' Aotearoa to the British in 1840 by signing Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It should be noted at this point that Māori never ceded Aotearoa, and the natural features the speaker would cite as metaphors for research have, in fact, been the subject of claims before the Waitangi Tribunal. These points have ethical implications linked to Māori concerns about colonisation, and its ongoing effects in the contemporary academy, such as those illustrated by both the subject matter and mode of presentation of this keynote. Firstly, a speaker can expect to be taken to task by a Māori audience if he or she purports to respect Māori knowledge while mispronouncing Māori kupu (words, phrases). Secondly, a speaker is open to vigorous critique when rehearsing or arguing from Eurocentric myths about national history, or items of scientism (such as those based on racist or sexist beliefs) that were excised from the canons of science many decades ago.

For privacy reasons, we will not reveal the presenter's name nor the specific metaphor to which he referred. Instead, we will broadly discuss the process that the original architects used to establish the metaphor. They borrowed an unrelated science metaphor and gave it a facile translation into Māori words. Through this process, they imposed a

human-centred act – research – onto the ‘things themselves’, which were the natural phenomena naturally occurring phenomena carrying with them Māori names, ancestral links, and postcolonial histories of struggle. The inventors of the metaphor both scientised and Māori-fied: they made a Māori concept a methodology, and made the methodology a Māori concept. The creators of this metaphor attempt to meld Māori and Western knowledge systems, and liken this amalgam to an ongoing merging and separation.

Māori concepts and their terms have been translated in this way for many some years now, so this use of a dubious ‘Māori metaphor’ is not particularly remarkable in that regard. We identified, while listening, that there is something at work innervating all of its kind. This is a problem that can be described as innate, because it lies within the act or concept itself, and has nothing to do with how widely acceptable or dominant the problem has become. However, we were also aware that the problem itself has indeed become dominant. As with many metaphors of this kind, the academy and public policy analysts immediately treat this metaphor as ‘true’ and as evidence that Māori knowledge is included in funding and mainstream research. The non-Māori keynote speaker innocently invoked or ‘called’ this metaphor, as evidence to support his message of ‘job done’ in a specific policy sector dealing with Aotearoa-New Zealand funding.

The importance of the individual’s voice in these contexts also needs to be addressed, because the utterance of the self and other takes on particular prominence, even in philosophical discussions. It should be noted that voice is given power and presence by the phenomenon of ‘mana’ (see, for instance, Robinson, 2005), and so one’s utterance is partly personal, partly propelled by the external world. Thus, although we are more interested in the original metaphor and its ontological assumptions, it is also important to consider the link of the presenter and his voice to that original problem. The keynote should not be misconstrued as merely a site for a ventriloquism act, and indeed ‘voice’ (*reo*, in the Māori language) is as important as the form of language (also ‘*reo*’) that someone may reiterate or replicate. But an act of ventriloquism is what the speaker delivered as he presented a series of extracts from previous work by various Māori and Pacific researchers, but added no synthesis, analysis or thinking of his own. He merely thawed several snap-frozen utterances and delivered them to the audience. We quickly add here that Māori presenters also fall into the trap of wrapping a Māori concept over a Western research method, and of particular importance in these instances is the recognition that the presenter’s *whakapapa* (‘genealogy’, in this usage) plays a part in both what is said and, indeed, what the presenter is likely to say given ancestral and environmental influences. It is not uncommon, then, to find Māori audiences either in awe of, or underwhelmed by, a presenter because he or she speaks in a way similar to that of his or her ancestors.

Implicated in voice is, of course, the question. Most of us have been unable to answer questions adequately, even by our own standards. In our current instance, we discerned a philosophical concern within the presentation and addressed it on that basis, by directing questions at the presenter. The questions were in this case wrapped around statements, resulting in a blunt response being incorporated with the idea that there were further, philosophical possibilities within the interrogator’s theoretical positioning. The questions and challenges that the Māori author and attendee posed directly to the presenter were along the following lines (not verbatim):

- 'you have not addressed the nature of Māori philosophy in the presentation. This lack of a Māori ontology renders weak both the presentation *and* your [the presenter's] credibility'
- 'I am appalled that you're mispronouncing the Māori language'
- 'it seems to be a recurring theme that Māori have to educate Pākehā on Māori philosophy. The issues that you've raised have a Māori philosophical premise that you have avoided but they need to take centre stage in your presentation. You've unfortunately made a philosophically dense idea, unphilosophical'.

These words were delivered bluntly. On reflection, we were concerned for the presenter as well, because the gaps in his presentation leave him spiritually as well as challenged in terms of his credibility. The issue of 'spiritual' arises here because Māori understand that metaphysics is not merely an abstract enterprise but actually invokes the entities being spoken of (Mika, 2017). On this occasion, the speaker was out of his depth (and, again, philosophical questions will often expose lacunae within a Māori presentation as well). The presenter at this conference could not engage with the metaphysics behind the concerned author's challenge. Unfortunately, this lack of understanding on the part of the speaker (undoubtedly shared by many in the largely Western conference audience) can threaten to leave behind a vaguely unpleasant air: an unspoken suggestion that the Māori response is both impolite and incoherent.

Remarkably, it is philosophy that is the greatest challenge to mainstream thinking in other variations on this context. An almost converse situation arose with Cooper (2012), a Māori scholar from Ngāti Whanaunga and Ngāti Pūkenga, when a Māori principal took exception to his presentation because it was critically philosophical with its incorporation of traditional Māori knowledge, and did not deliver on her expectations of 'the latest' research. She tried to neutralise the philosophical discussion with banal research empiricism, whereas the presentation we witnessed was devoid of philosophy. In both instances, philosophy is either tacitly or expressly defied: in relation to his own experience, Cooper describes this denial of philosophy as a dominant orientation that understands 'scientific knowledge production methods [as] the only way to produce and recognise "real" knowledge' (2012, p. 71). Cooper's observation is perhaps the first that deals with the Māori relationship between response and philosophy in a broad sense.

The response of nature: the problem of the 'research metaphor'

So in our current example, what is it about the presentation itself that stung one of the authors in particular to a blunt response? What idea was brought into contention or was threatened? As we have noted, the problem that the authors discerned was bigger than the presentation and deserves speaking about more broadly, because 'Translation for the West' – which is essentially the crux of assigning a Māori metaphor to a Western research practice – crops up often. We have deliberately capitalised 'translate' and its cognates here to show that it has metaphysical significance. Imposing English equivalents for Māori terms results in a loss of philosophical depth for the latter (Stewart, 2016b), and the converse process also raises difficulties: the practice of finding Māori names for fundamentally Western phenomena involves ideas as much as language. In that light, Translation is not only about words but also about ideas and their cultural frameworks or worldviews

(Kearney, 1984). Yet this ideological aspect seems to go unacknowledged in the increasing popularity of Translation, which hence acts as a 'Trojan horse' importing Pākehā ideas into Māori research and associated systems (Smith, 1986, p. 3). We can note that, in the case of non-Māori presenters, the metaphors they invoke have probably been designed with help from Māori individuals or groups. Here, our central focus is not on individual cases but on the underlying assumption that a Māori explanation can be readily Translated into a Western context, and vice versa.

The nature of this problem is a philosophical one, which we suggest derives not from a research process but an ontological quandary. By 'ontological' we mean, from a Māori standpoint, that ground that stands beyond our perception but can be the subject of speculation – the 'Papa' (Earth Mother/Ground) of thought and existence (Mika, 2017). It is not separate from 'epistemological' but it is prior to it, because the particular orientation that may be thought of as a 'cultural lens' allows things to be grouped so that they provide knowledge. But it is this initial turn to the world that needs contemplating, so to focus on either research or its language as the cause of the problem is analogous to believing that a plant consists only of its above-ground appearance. No new research method will get to its roots, because any research method is determined in line with that appearance (and may or may not give a good account of that appearance but cannot get at its own philosophical origins).

But the ontological issue spoken of here can indeed replicate itself in a template for research. There seem to be numerous discussions on 'method', which is seen as a most important thing to get right because it dictates the outcome of the research itself. It has become almost trendy to assign a Māori metaphor from nature to what is essentially a Western phenomenon. These various ways of describing method, we argue, amount to little more than that Western entity, to which we now turn. The inevitable result is a distortion of the Māori metaphor.

The translator

What is this 'Western phenomenon'? It is extremely difficult to define because it exists prior to the epistemic certainty of the academic convention that we must utilise in this article (yet also gives life to the latter). It could be argued that research is merely a pre-ordained outcome of a particular gesture to the world, and so it seems to be solely a human-constructed thing. From a Māori perspective, however, this desire to view the world in a certain way is also an entity *within which* the human self is located. We may call this 'thing' a discourse, a principle, an ontological given, etc.; regardless of what we choose to call it, it has been established as a self-replicating entity, and our thinking acts in its continual slipstream. This ontological spectrum that sets the horizons of our Māori thought and expression immediately hardens and fragments. It is unusual because, while it can now be thought of as our 'whanaunga' (relation), it is not traditionally related to us, nor is it amiable. It sets itself apart from us, thereby setting any discussion of anything apart from us, too.

In a Māori worldview, any proposition is thus transformed as an idea separate from the person discussing it. 'Kaupapa Māori', for instance, becomes important only insofar as it is a concept distant from the researcher, if it is imagined as a framework. It may have dodged a chance at criticality (Stewart, 2016a) by choosing not to engage with the 'intercultural

space' that is as much material as conceptual. By its name, it is commingled with Papa – which Mika (2017) identifies is a traditional ground of thinking – but crucially differs from Papa to the extent that it sets up a hardened terrain of thought. It gives rise to paradox in its own way, because it is distant from, yet intimately connected with, our thought. In that way, it acts very much like an insidious coloniser, mimicking the primordial being and thought of Papa through its stated appearance (its name) but ultimately opposing the depths of Papa by ironing out apparent inconsistencies and rough conceptual terrain that Papa has always thrown up. When it becomes distanced from the self and other things in the world, it is damaging and colonising; it is perhaps more a part of our utterances and perceptions than we care to admit.

This colonising influence on thought is a kind of fast-acting vortex, where a concept foreign to it is sucked into its midst and an agreeable, hegemonic substitute is spat out. Often, Māori terms are substituted for English ones in government policy. One topical example is 'whānau', which is given the gloss of 'family' but in fact opens onto the following: the full potential of ideas as themselves related to the self; the nature of other dimensions as connected to all things in the world; the deep implication of all things with a primordial substance, for instance. In no respect does 'family' do justice to the various ontological givens of 'whānau', though. Māori would argue that Translation of 'whānau' has implications beyond a mismatch of meanings, stifling instead the full potential of the world to be brought into relief by a term. The function of a term as a spiritual accompaniment to sound (Pihama, Smith, Taki, & Lee, 2004, p. 21), where sound itself is sourced in the extra-human world (Raerino, 2000) and is therefore a participant in the metaphysical substance of Papa, is reduced to simply a reference to a single, conceptually or concretely present object (see, e.g. Derrida, 1982; Heidegger, 1977; Novalis, 1960b). At a broader level, science clearly operates in this colonising way in contact with indigenous knowledge, extracting useful 'facts' from their traditional cultural contexts and meanings. We liken this process to Translation: it occurs in multiple facets of Māori life, not just within academic and research contexts. It happens through Western medical intervention, for instance, which treats the Māori body according to its visible, tangible qualities – its 'what-ness'. It also takes place in the law, which refers any utterance that the Māori body makes to a machinery of correspondence truth and individual morality. In education, it changes thinking to a commodifiable event, capable of economical transmission to the learner. In tertiary education, though, we are concerned chiefly with research, and this Translating monolith reconfigures one thing to another so that the initial hard, fragmented world stays intact. The other entity is pulverised and formed anew to meet that ossified expectation. It is ultimately *formulated*.

This Translation-entity that is so active in Western thought assumes that ideas that are 'other' to this hardened worldview are imaginary and translucent. It alone has its internal validity – not the Māori world! – and other modes of expression are to be transformed into itself. From a Western perspective, free-floating Māori discourse can only be made solid, and in that act made dense with 'truth' and hence 'true', via that Translator: digested and disgorged in opaque form. Interestingly, the Māori entity being transformed is certainly not free of solidity, but is instead possessed of an entirely different materiality to that insisted on by the Translation-entity. The Translating thing can only see a vacuous, flimsy entity that needs to be embedded in itself in order to be valid. Its ability to perceive the several vortices of materiality within the Māori concept-entity is interesting for the

Māori speaker because its hardness also translates as a deafness ('taringa mārō') to both its own transparency and the validity of the Māori concept. Moreover, the fluidity of the Māori concept – which aims to unify things in the world – is a threat to the formulating, stultifying thinghood of the translation-entity.

Logic, including science and rational approaches to discussions, tries to establish a concept according to some base rules, and herein lies a self-delusion of dominant Western thought, for these ground assumptions are themselves reliant on an earlier given (Bowie, 1997). They are not as reliable as assumed, even where they propagate themselves as solid, final and dependable. They, too, float. The work of the Translator renders Māori concepts and their objects perceivable in the same way and based on the same ground assumptions as their Western counterparts. How this colonising event plays out in research – where the Māori natural world is reformed in line with the solidity of methodology – deserves some attention in the light of Māori intuition, which we suggest prefers to view the natural world as self-organisable, indeed unTranslatable.

Translating the Māori natural world for research methodologies

Power and place are living and interconnected entities (Deloria Jr, 2001). When Translated in order to meet the needs of a research methodology, however, they are rendered inert and merely useful. The natural world for Māori, we argue, cannot be uncritically translated, because it is meant to evade the restrictions imposed on it by the human mind, and it arranges itself in its own time, in its own relationships with all other entities, and with its own outcome at the forefront. It seems unlikely that a conceptually wrong way of engaging with the world is devastating for the world itself, but Māori philosophy suggests that how one represents things has consequences for everything at once. One does not often see such importance attached to the thing-in-itself in Western philosophy, apart from, perhaps, in the thinking of the English and Early German Romantics, who noted that there were ethical ways of conceiving of things. In Māori thought, however, this is precisely what is at stake when one makes proclamations about the world. It is possible that this phenomenon is not unique to the human world, either, with all entities having equal connection to the world at large. It seems that any particular gesture towards the world – whether from rock, tree or human – can have profound consequences.

Thus, we have to think of our decisions to transport Māori concepts and metaphors into Western-derived words and domains, and vice versa, as having the potential for these sorts of repercussions. Metaphors arise in specific contexts and as part of cultural traditions of meaning. Metaphors cannot be simply translated by this 'coding' process: a Western metaphor may or may not work in a Māori context, and a Māori metaphor may or not make sense in Western terms. We have seen that this 'transportation' is actually a 'Translation', and, though not disputing the worth of translation in principle, are reminded that translation is never a politically neutral process (Blommaert, 1999). Care must be taken when one set of indigenous concepts (and indigenous terms for those concepts) is about to be somehow equated with another set of concepts, derived from Western knowledges and languages (Ahenakew, Andreotti, Cooper, & Hireme, 2014). It is here that translation becomes Translation: the point at which the colonising machinery accelerates the process of remaking other concepts according to its own categories and methodologies.

Research methodologies used by Māori, as we have stated, appear to be especially prone to unsatisfactory use of Māori metaphor. A conventional approach is often re-named as a naturally occurring feature in the Māori world – for example, a ‘moana’ (ocean) methodology could be invented (although we have not encountered such a methodology) – and this naming is meant to signal something significant and different from other methodologies. The researcher might say that they link to the ocean; that their research engages with it; or that they intend to interview others who link to the ocean; but, fundamentally, the methodology is the conventional one. It is interesting to note, in these scenarios, how the various Māori names for a methodology do not actually disclose anything other than the original ‘Western-ness’ of that methodology. Typically, the orthodox methodology involves data collection and then analysis. In other words, ‘Māori-fying’ the original Western approach does not make it anything other than the original Western approach.

But what is it about the nature of the dominant methodology of data collection and analysis that is anathema to the Māori natural world – and thus makes it Translation? Chiefly, it is one manifestation among several of the tendency to harden that we spoke of above. It clarifies (by making overly dense) things in the world too readily through a predisposition to the world that seeks to fragment its things. This over-clarification happens in several ways. First, the researcher has already reaffirmed that the world *is* fragmentable, simply by assuming that data collection and analysis is the desired methodology. In that act, both the researcher and his or her object of inquiry are condensed, or made readily apparent. The world is treated as possessed of knowledge – there to be designated so that it is graspable. With that whole process of ‘enframing’ in train, the things to be approached *as* knowable, gratifying to a strong subjectivism, and fathomable are specifically identified (they could include elders, experts and so on). Language is also determined to be a unit of analysis, no longer self-evolving and autonomous, but rather under the control of the researcher. In one description, an individual word is the ‘*kākahu*/[cloak] of sound’ (Pihama et al., 2004, p. 21), but when made a human product it is not so much a gentle curvature of the world in its totality as it is a tool. Indeed, the mischievous nature of language (Novalis, 1960a) could have tripped the researcher up and *impeded* the research process. Now, though, the researcher in these instances only has to hone language down to fit questions, responses and then analysis. At all points, things in the world – language, researcher, and research participant – are controlled. There is an underlying misapprehension in educational research that philosophical problems can be solved using technical forms of investigation.

We can assume here that there is a huge mismatch between the fluid Māori conceptual world and its objects, and the fixative, calculative nature of research. It is useful to consider why the two ontologies of fluidity and fixity cannot co-exist. Why, in other words, do we assert that what is metaphysically unspoken within a Māori concept is damaged by the hidden machinery of Western research discourse? The answer to this question lies in at least two directions: first, research itself, as we have described, inherently derives from a worldview that is fundamentally unlike that of Māori. Secondly, there is an influence of one, which has historically accrued to itself ideas and practices of imperialism (Smith, 1999), upon the other, which has traditionally not been so centrally concerned with the human. When brought into contact – even in only a conceptual sense – the former asserts its underlying predisposition to conquer and order the latter. We can assert that

a natural feature *is* such-and-such, and it is therefore unproblematically transferable, even into a dangerous domain (from the perspective of Māori interests). We need to remember that this ‘re-presentation-al’ step changes the imperceptible essence of the world according to cultural frameworks carried in language. When the essence of a thing is considered, the problem slips to a deeper level, at which the Māori concept or word is already possessed of its own life.

Conclusion

The inevitable conclusion must be that it is better simply to keep research methodologies as they are – derived from several trajectories of Western history – rather than try to make them something else through an already-damaged Māori worldview. Stewart, Tamatea, and Mika (2015) have identified that the pōwhiri process carries its own challenges when conducted within colonising scenarios, and we now wonder if that same hegemonic confusion arises in research, where something as apparently simple as Māori labels and concepts are made to conform to Western philosophical assumptions. As Mika and Stewart (2015) note, the Gaze of fixity – where Māori are enjoined to ‘perform’ as a spectacle for the coloniser – takes place in the minutiae of everyday Māori lives, and the Translation of an indigenous concept for a Western analytic process seems to fit that same phenomenon. If that speculation on our part is true, then it seems that government policy likes to see Māori concepts perform along a set of expectations bounded by Western ontology. Māori language and its thought are therefore entertaining: they sound nice, they act neatly and obediently, and they can be *seen* to fulfil a certain fetishist role.

In the introduction we identified that honour was given to the presenter who features in our vignette, despite our overall opposition to his message. A Māori process of response must always recognise the initial impetus for thought, with the other options being that the presenter is damned with faint praise or not responded to at all. Our gratitude also rests in the fact that an opportunity has been offered to clarify some of the problems associated with Translation. The difficulties that Translation pose are, anecdotally speaking, increasingly confronting Māori critical writers. These problems, we reiterate, beset the Māori presenter as much as the Pākēhā, when either one establishes a rapport with Translated material. The hope arising from these instances is that Māori will become clearer in identifying the nature of colonised process and become more critical in responding to it. Critical dialogue around the possibilities of response – and centring on research, as well, that does not presume a Western dimension at the forefront – must surely be at the helm of any discussion that aims to prefer a Māori set of philosophies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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